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Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report summarizes the situation of Palestinian women between October 2003 and September 2004, in reference to Economic and Social Council resolution 2004/56 of 23 July 2004. It reviews the unfolding humanitarian and socio-economic crisis in the situation of women and provides an overview of the assistance provided to Palestinian women by entities of the United Nations system, in particular with regard to economic activities, humanitarian assistance, education and training, health, the human rights of women, and the media and advocacy. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2004/56 on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the Economic and Social Council, concerned about the grave deterioration of the situation of Palestinian women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation and to assist Palestinian women by all available means, and to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-ninth session a report, including information provided by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report, which covers the period from October 2003 September 2004, reviews the situation of Palestinian women based on information from United Nations bodies or individuals that monitor the situation of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Such bodies and individuals include the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967. The reports of those bodies and individuals made occasional references to the situation of women but did not provide in-depth analysis of the specific situation of women within the overall population during the reporting period. The Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women, its causes and consequences visited the Occupied Palestinian Territory in June 2004. However, the report on that visit was not available at the time the present report was prepared (see para. 38 below).

3. The report further reflects information submitted by entities of the United Nations system that provide assistance to Palestinian women, including the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO), the Department of Public Information, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the World Bank. In response to Economic and Social Council resolution 2004/56, the report also draws on information contained in the report prepared by ESCWA on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan (A/59/89).

4. The first part of the report provides a review of the second intifada (from 29 September 2000) and its specific impact on the situation of Palestinian women, as well as the political and socio-economic circumstances of the Palestinian community in general. The second part of the report provides information on how the United Nations system has continued to assist Palestinian women.

5. Taking into account that women tend to suffer disproportionately during times of political unrest and instability, the report stresses the need to mainstream gender perspectives in policies and programmes to ensure that the concerns and needs of both women and men are addressed.

II. Situation of Palestinian women

6. In the period under review, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People expressed grave concern over the devastating effects of the occupation on the lives of the most vulnerable members of Palestinian society, women and children.[1] The Committee noted that the hardship of daily life was felt most acutely by Palestinian women who carried the burden of responsibility within the household because of the death, imprisonment or unemployment of male members.[2] UNSCO reported that women also assumed the additional burden of responsibility as caregivers to the injured in the absence of adequate institutional services in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

7. It also reported that Palestinian women were among those who had died since the onset of the crisis. Between September 2000 and September 2004, more than 3,500 Palestinians had died, including approximately 650 children under the age of 18 and 250 women.

8. Over the past four years, the number of women detainees in prison increased. According to UNSCO, prior to the outbreak of the crisis, there were three Palestinian women prisoners. Since then, an additional 300 women have been arrested, of whom 103 remained in prison in September 2004. Furthermore, the death, imprisonment and unemployment of adult male members of the community increased poverty and social burdens that contributed to increased domestic violence and stress (A/59/89-E/2004/21, para. 58).

9. According to UNRWA, the social, economic and cultural context of women's health remained challenging during the period under review owing to the high birth rate of Palestine refugee women. In particular, malnutrition continued to have a major impact on the lives of Palestinian women and children. WHO reported that during a home visit programme conducted by the Ministry of Health, 69.7 per cent of 1,768 expectant women, within one month of delivery, were found to be anaemic. UNRWA indicated that in 2003 the anaemia rate of nursing mothers accessing its services was 15.3 per cent, and that the anaemia rate of pregnant women was 38.3 per cent. UNSCO reported that the nutritional health status of women and children was also affected by the internal closures. In particular, the closure policy impacted greatly on food security, which led to a decline in both the quantity and the quality of food of 73 per cent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip populations, with four out of 10 households identified as chronically insecure by FAO.

10. Human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory continued to destroy the fabric of Palestinian society (A/59/256, para. 6), including the rights to freedom of movement, to choose a residence, to an adequate standard of living including adequate food, clothing and housing, to education, to health and to life, all of which continued to drastically decline (A/59/381, paras. 30-86). Land confiscation and the destruction of cultivated fields and houses reached unprecedented levels. Families and communities were divided, farmers were denied access to their land, workers to their jobs, children and youth to schools, colleges

and universities and women and children to basic health and social services (A/59/381, para. 30). With the continued demolition of houses and destruction of property, damage to public structures and properties reached an estimated US$ 1.2 billion.[3] In addition, Palestinian women in prison were reported to have been subjected to torture or inhuman and degrading treatment (A/59/256, para. 6).

11. Restrictions on the movement of goods and persons continued to exacerbate the humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory by increasing unemployment and poverty, preventing health care and interrupting education (A/59/89-E/2004/21, para. 14). The ILO noted that mobility restrictions entailed different consequences for men and women. Regarding access to education, restrictions affect female teachers and pupils more than their male counterparts, owing to the difficulties and dangers they face travelling to and from schools. Fearing for their safety, parents may keep daughters from attending classes. Female teachers are more likely to stop going to work when they have to walk long distances in isolated areas to avoid checkpoints and settlers.[4]

12. UNFPA reported that access issues continued to be an important barrier to women's utilization of appropriate reproductive health care, including family planning and obstetric care. Soldiers at checkpoints prevented ambulances and individuals on their way to health-care facilities from reaching the nearest hospital (A/59/381, para. 79). UNSCO noted that medical personnel were unable to reach their place of work regularly and that distribution of medical supplies to rural areas was difficult. Delays have resulted in women delivering their babies while waiting to pass, which has led to maternal and infant deaths.[5]

13. The severe economic depression of the Palestinian economy since September 2000 continued unabated during the reporting period.[6] Reality of life in the occupied territories is one of economic strangulation, with consequent far-reaching social impacts.[7] The mild economic recovery reported in 2003 was short-lived, with trade flows remaining below pre-intifada levels.[8] The World Bank reported that Palestinian business owners and managers continued to report difficulties arising from internal closures that hampered their ability to receive necessary inputs and to market goods. The Bank indicated that in 2004 domestic employment had recovered to the extent that the number of Palestinians employed in the West Bank and Gaza surpassed pre-intifada levels. However, it was reported that the number of unemployed had increased, from 73,000 in the third quarter preceding the intifada in 2000, to 198,000 currently.[9] Low levels of employment resulted in high levels of poverty among Palestinians, particularly women. According to the World Bank, by mid-2004, 47 per cent of Palestinians lived in poverty, on less than $2.10 per day. Female-headed households display an incidence of poverty 1.3 times higher than households headed by men.[10] Community and family disapproval of women's work in the absence of male breadwinners are major obstacles to women seeking wage employment.[11]

14. In spite of high-level educational attainment, women remained marginalized in the labour market. The International Labour Organization reports that the generally positive correlation between female education and labour force participation was not applicable to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Women's labour force participation remains low, in spite of their high and successful secondary school enrolment. That observation was attributed to the high fertility rate among Palestinian women, relatively early marriage and large families. Those factors, coupled with the large

numbers of male Palestinian prisoners, the high number of persons killed in conflict and the destruction of homes, placed increased pressure on the care economy, and specifically on women, the primary providers of care.[12]

15. In cases where women participate in the labour market, they are mostly located in the agriculture and service sectors. Women are deeply affected by movement restrictions and closures, which affect agricultural production.[13] The ILO observed that, by comparison with men, women are disadvantaged in terms of wages and social security benefits, and that there are unequal barriers for women entrepreneurs in terms of property and inheritance rights, access to credit, penal liability and the availability of childcare facilities. Households resorted to a variety of strategies to cope with the sharp fall in income, including reducing expenditure and consumption, postponing payment of bills, applying for credit, seeking family support, engaging in subsistence activities and other measures.[14] The ILO also found that coping strategies of households tend to fall disproportionately on women and to restrict women's options.[15]

16. UNSCO carried out field research in 30 West Bank rural communities in 2004 and found that women attempted to substitute for the loss of male income, even if that entailed travel and overnight stay outside the community. In addition, field research revealed that, although some women found work in textile workshops, the majority worked inside the community as unpaid family agricultural labourers. It was also found that women's entry into the labour force did not result in economic development, but, instead, added to existing domestic and childcare burdens.

17. According to UNICEF, there are significant gaps in the female literacy rate — only 87.4 per cent — compared with a 96.3 per cent male literacy rate. UNICEF reported that the gaps are most prominent among the older population. School enrolment rates at the basic, secondary school and post-secondary levels grew during the past decade and are roughly the same for boys and girls. Furthermore, enrolment was slightly higher for girls than boys at the first two levels. UNICEF also reported that a substantial number of males and females aged 10-24 years do not continue to secondary education. The main reason for boys and young men dropping out was attributed to lack of interest in education, which could be an indication that starting work is a higher priority for men and boys. On the other hand, the figures for girls show that nearly half (46.5 per cent) drop out because of marriage.[16]

18. Efforts were made to address discrimination against women and the concerns of Palestinian women through the newly established Ministry of Women's Affairs. Previously a sub-unit of the Ministry of Planning, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was mandated to reinforce the gender mainstreaming strategy that previously had been the major responsibility of focal points in various ministries. According to UNDP, a number of objectives have been identified to address the low participation of women in the labour force (only 11 per cent of women of employment age participate in the labour force) owing to low salaries, compared to those of men, and poverty among female-headed households. The objectives include upgrading governmental political commitment to include gender, democracy and human rights issues in the policies and plans of the various ministries and relevant legislation and regulations; linking lobbying and advocacy activities with the development of policies and laws; and building a network of links with women governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations and human rights organizations at

the regional and international levels, and exchanging experience with them on the implementation and support of international conventions on women and human rights, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

III. Assistance to Palestinian women

Economic activities

19. The World Bank reported on a number of projects aimed at improving the situation of Palestinian people, including women. The 2005 higher education project aims at strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and at providing support to higher education institutions to improve the management, quality and relevance of programmes. The objectives of the $80-million social safety net reform project are to protect and enhance the human capital of children in the poorest households and to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Ministry of Social Affairs to assist in the implementation of the special hardship case programmes. Under an improved targeting scheme, poor adult women living on their own because of separation, divorce or widowhood will receive cash assistance from the special hardship case programmes. Children suffering from malnutrition and women of childbearing age benefit from the second emergency services support project, which is supported by a Trust Fund grant and co-financed by five other donors in the amount of $40 million.

20. The World Bank also implemented the second Palestinian NGO project. A main selection criteria for receiving emergency grants is the project's ability to reach women as direct beneficiaries. Under the project, a counselling centre for women in difficult circumstances was designed with the objectives of providing support, therapy, advocacy and vocational training services to Palestinian women subject to domestic violence, and to build institutional capacity aimed at reducing the incidence of violence against Palestinian girls and women. The project is financed by the Government of Italy through the World Bank. The Gaza industrial estate project development objectives are to increase direct and indirect employment in Gaza and to contribute to the gross domestic product of Gaza by creating conditions conducive to private sector industrial investment, including appropriate physical infrastructure. The project has a well developed management information system and includes a breakdown of workers by sex, which is monitored and updated on a monthly basis. Although employment figures under the project are currently below expectations owing to the crisis, on average there are about 100 women employed by tenant firms representing approximately 18 per cent of total employment.

21. The ILO established a Palestinian fund for employment and social protection. The fund provides a strategic framework for mobilizing resources to improve the social conditions of the Palestinian people, who are suffering from both occupation and diminishing welfare. It also serves as a tool for the consolidation of all activities undertaken to generate employment and provide social protection, ranging from technical advice and capacity-building to direct financial assistance. The fund is expected to integrate a significant gender component and to apply a gender mainstreaming approach. In selecting projects, consideration will be given to activities that support the employment and social protection needs of Palestinian

women and men workers. Project proposals will be evaluated to ensure attention to gender equality concerns.

22. UNDP initiated a number of projects aimed at women's economic empowerment. As part of its Emergency Response Division, the UNDP programme of assistance to the Palestinian people continued to work with the Ministry of Agriculture to execute a poverty alleviation project targeting female-headed rural households. The project aims at achieving sustainable food security and creating a source of income for rural women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip through investing in livestock. In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, 42 small agricultural income-generating projects for female-headed households have been established. Another project provides emergency support to existing small-income generation projects run by female-headed households. The project aims at providing financial and technical support to 30 small women-run projects that were affected as a result of the ongoing political crisis. As a result of economic stagnation and the high unemployment rate of male breadwinners, the small and unsustainable projects run by those women are the only means for income generation for the households. Support to those small projects aims to increase their sustainability and potential for generating income for the households.

23. UNRWA reported granting 4,498 loans valued at $2.47 million to women through its microfinance and microenterprise programme. The microcredit community support programme also issued more than $880,000 in loans to both low-income families and entrepreneurs, including women.

Humanitarian assistance

24. As follow-up to an FAO/WFP food security and nutrition assessment undertaken across all districts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 2003, FAO reported working on the establishment of a multisectoral integrated food insecurity and vulnerability information system. The objective is to facilitate stakeholders' access to comprehensive, up-to-date and user-friendly information on food security, nutrition and vulnerability. Institutional mechanisms and capacity for the collection, analysis and use of food security- and nutrition-related information disaggregated by sex will also be strengthened. The sex-disaggregated information will provide a basis for decision makers in the design, targeting and implementation of policies, strategies and interventions designed to protect and promote food security and improve the nutritional status of the entire population — men and women, boys and girls — throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

25. UNIFEM opened a programme office in Jerusalem in April 2004 under the auspices of the UNDP Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People. UNIFEM is actively involved in local United Nations coordination efforts, including the Consolidated Appeals Process for humanitarian aid to the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the United Nations inter-agency humanitarian advocacy group.

26. UNRWA continued to assist Palestine refugee women through its special hardship case programme. UNRWA reported that of the special hardship case families, 46 per cent were families headed by women. Under that programme, families are provided with a critical safety net in the form of food support and selective cash assistance. Community services are provided for women through 64 women's programme centres, which include occupational training programmes,

kindergartens and nurseries. Over 90,000 refugees, mainly women and children, have benefited from those services.

27. WFP coordinated with local non-governmental organizations to implement the Supplementary Feeding Programme for 5,000 children and their families, which included two free medical days for mothers and children under the age of 12. A total of 217 women and children attended the free medical service.

Education and training

28. The UNICEF response in the education sector focused on ensuring that as many children as possible had the opportunity to continue learning, even if they cannot reach their schools. UNICEF supported alternative projects for children in areas experiencing strict closures, as well as initiatives to keep children in school, such as the "back to school" campaign, to ensure that a million Palestinian children could attend school by September 2003 and remain in school throughout the school year. UNICEF also supported the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in integrating basic life skills into the curricula of grades 4 and 9; the curricula of grades 5 and 10 were to be covered during 2004. Training in effective screening and treatment of psychosocial distress was provided to school counsellors, kindergarten teachers and social workers to assist them in supporting Palestinian women and children affected by ongoing violence. UNICEF has made concerted efforts to mainstream gender perspectives into all UNICEF programme communication. During 2003/04, specific programme communication materials targeting the girl child and women were developed, including on iron deficiency, anaemia and the importance of breastfeeding, a life-skills training manual, remedial education worksheets and anti-smoking campaigns for young people.

29. The ILO reported that three Palestinian women participated in a national training workshop organized by the ILO Regional Office for Arab States on the theme "Vocational training methods and training curricula for people with disabilities", held in Amman in 2004 for 10 Palestinian rehabilitation workers. In 2004, a new training programme on the theme "Promotion of social dialogue: strengthening national social dialogue mechanisms" was initiated. The programme is aimed at fully involving women national machineries in all activities. The first course was held from 13 to 19 June 2004, with 15 Palestinian participants from the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions and the Palestinian Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture. A Palestinian woman from a trade union participated in the course. A Palestinian woman representative from the newly established Ministry of Women's Affairs of the Palestinian Authority also attended as an observer.

30. With the cooperation of the Centre for Arab Women Training and Research, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) organized a meeting of 16 representatives of key Palestinian women NGOs and institutions in Tunis in February 2004. The meeting aimed at identifying the strategic needs of Palestinian women in the social and human sciences, and to develop a plan by which UNESCO could contribute to meeting those needs. Outcomes of the Tunis meeting were a project proposal for the establishment of a specialized independent Palestinian women's resource centre, which was prepared and submitted for consideration, as well as funding to various stakeholders. The objective of the centre would be to contribute to the development of research-based

policies that promote gender equality and the human rights of Palestinian women by serving as a monitoring centre and clearing house on information related to women's issues in Palestine. It would, inter alia, conduct, collect and house research and documentation produced on the status and the condition of Palestinian women; analyse and disseminate information to policy makers and relevant partners; and facilitate training, networking and empowerment of women's organizations.

31. Taking into account the link between women's and girls' education and women's empowerment, UNDP supported the construction of a large number of girls' schools in rural communities where tradition does not allow girls to travel to a distant school, as well as the expansion of schools to allow increased enrolment of girls. Approximately seven schools for girls were constructed, expanded or rehabilitated with sanitary facilities. Assistance was also provided for the development of gender-sensitive educational curricula and teaching modules and for teacher training in their use. The objective is to foster appropriate gender perspectives among both boys and girls. A training manual on gender issues was developed and widely distributed to schools throughout the West Bank and Gaza.

32. To address the lack of education and skills of some women, WFP supported literacy-, health- and nutrition-skills training. Advanced specialized courses on the environment, farming, animal husbandry and other income-generating activities, such as handicrafts, home gardening and food processing, were provided.

33. In collaboration with UNIFEM, the UNRWA Department of Education continued to assist Palestine refugee women acquire modern technological skills through a gender project. The project stresses equal access to information and communication technologies by Palestine refugee women and men, encourages gender equality in recruitment and retention policies, builds capacity to produce relevant information content for Palestine refugee women and helps them fulfil their socio-economic, reproductive and community participation roles.

Health

34. UNFPA continued its emergency obstetric care programme. In particular, training was provided to health-care providers at the community level. For the period under review, UNFPA trained 168 physicians, nurses and midwives in community emergency obstetric care, bringing the total number to 268 providers since the inception of the emergency programme. In addition, 85 health-care providers were trained in how to deal with traumatized women. A mapping exercise of primary health-care facilities with reproductive health services was carried out and completed in October 2003. The exercise was completed in partnership with the largest service providers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory from Government, non-governmental organizations and UNRWA facilities. It was the first of its kind and will be key to improving service delivery in the area of reproductive health, especially for women.

35. As part of its regular programme activities, UNFPA also collaborated with a national NGO in producing a manual on psychosocial and legal counselling in reproductive health. The manual covers a number of difficult areas of reproductive health and rights, including rape, incest, domestic violence and psychological abuse. It also provides a legal guideline and framework for providers in dealing with women and their families, in order to promote empowerment and rehabilitation. It is the first of its kind in the Arab region and was produced in Arabic.

36. WHO addressed the issue of mental health in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially among women, who are greatly affected by the social stigma of mental illness. Women also continued to bear major responsibility for caring for family members while coping with their own ill health. As part of the implementation of the new mental health policy, three community mental health centres were opened and an anti-stigma campaign was launched to address the general public. The majority of psychologists and social workers working in the mental health system are women.

37. UNRWA continued to provide maternal and child health-care and family planning services as an integral part of its primary health-care services to Palestine refugee women. UNRWA supported full immunization coverage for women and children against vaccine-preventable diseases; iron supplementation for women throughout pregnancy and post delivery; and health education programmes aimed at preventing HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. UNRWA sought to make its health programmes more gender-sensitive by obtaining, whenever possible, data disaggregated by sex, with the objective of reducing gender disparities in health care and health-care services.

Women's human rights, including the implications of violence against women

38. The Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women, its causes and consequences visited the Occupied Palestinian Territory on official mission from 13 to 18 June 2004. The purpose of the mission was to address the impact of the conflict and occupation on women, in particular the implications of violence against women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Special Rapporteur met with a number of Government officials, including the Minister of Women's Affairs and representatives of women's organizations. The conclusions of the Special Rapporteur will be presented to the Commission on Human Rights at its sixty-first session, in 2005.

39. In August 2004, the OHCHR Palestine office contributed to a workshop held in Ramallah for 15 high-ranking women from various Palestinian ministries, in cooperation with the Ministry of Women's Affairs. The workshop covered many issues, including international human rights mechanisms, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and women's rights.

40. OHCHR organized, under the component "Human rights education/awareness-building", a one-day seminar focusing on Palestinian women working in the development field, on the theme "Development and human rights". The seminar, held on 3 August 2004, in cooperation with the women's affairs centre located in the Gaza Strip, particularly addressed women working in the development field. Of the 24 trainees who participated in the seminar, 18 were women. The course aimed at strengthening the capacity of women working in the field of human rights and at providing them with the basic human rights instruments as tools to be used in their daily work. The seminar also succeeded in making linkages between development, human rights and the rights-based approach.

Advocacy and media

41. The Division for Palestinian Rights, Department of Political Affairs, continued in 2004 to work closely with civil society through international meetings and conferences, including to bring attention to the situation of Palestinian women. The

civil society declaration, adopted by the United Nations Forum of Civil Society in Support of Middle East Peace in Cape Town, South Africa, in July 2004, acknowledged that Palestinian women bear the harshest burden of the occupation, and called on women's organizations in Africa to express solidarity with Palestinian women. The plan of action adopted at the United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People, held at United Nations Headquarters in September 2004, specifically called for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) mandating the full participation of women in all international peace and justice efforts regarding Palestinian rights. The Division also continued to include information on the situation of Palestinian women in its monthly monitoring publication *Chronological Review of Events Relating to the Question of Palestine* and a monthly bulletin, as well as in its documents collection in the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL), under the subject category "Women". A special web address has been created permitting external web sites to link on an ongoing basis to the UNISPAL subject category on Palestinian women.

42. The Department of Public Information continued its annual international media seminars on peace in the Middle East, bringing together current and former policy makers from the region as well as senior officials, international experts and representatives of the world media. Several Palestinian women journalists participated in the seminar. The revised and updated Department of Public Information publication, issued in the six official languages of the United Nations, was widely disseminated to all United Nations field offices. Chapter 9 of the booklet addresses various issues concerning Palestinian women, including social and economic progress. On the United Nations web site, the News Centre has covered a wide range of developments related to the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and its impact on Palestinian women.

43. United Nations radio reported extensively on issues related to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women. The vital role of women as peacemakers and builders of society in many regions of the world, including the Palestinian Occupied Territory, was highlighted as one of "Ten stories the world should hear more about", a new project launched by the Department in May 2004. The issue of Palestinian women is also addressed on the programme "Women" produced by United Nations Radio. From 10 November to 19 December 2003, the Department organized a training programme for a group of six Palestinian broadcasters and journalists, including four women, to strengthen their professional capacity as information media personnel. The United Nations Information Service at Geneva also promoted the question of Palestine, for example, by issuing a press release on 24 June 2004, in English and French, on the visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territory by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women, its causes and consequences.

Institutional arrangements

44. In June 2004, UNDP entered into an agreement with the newly established Ministry of Women's Affairs of the Palestinian Authority to support the development of a three-year action plan aimed at promoting gender-sensitive structures, programmes and policies. The plan will be carried out in consultation with women's groups, NGOs, ministries and experts. UNDP, in coordination with UNIFEM, assisted the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Palestine with the drafting of

an interim work plan and strategic vision. In efforts to promote gender equality, including within the context of the Millennium Development Goals, the UNDP Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People has committed to providing the necessary human resource base to ensure the smooth operation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs. As a follow-up to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, support was also provided for the establishment of women's units within ministries of the Palestinian Authority to advocate for gender-sensitive policies and promote the establishment of an inter-ministerial committee for the advancement of women.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

45. In the reporting period, the ongoing conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territory had a significant negative effect on Palestinian women. Women were among those killed or wounded and/or who lost their spouses, children or family members. Furthermore, the declining economic conditions, caused by restrictions on movement, perpetuated massive unemployment, an increase in poverty and lack of access to health care, health-care services and education. Restriction of movement has also resulted in the death of pregnant women and infants. Furthermore, pressures of the ongoing conflict have led to increased domestic violence and psychological stress among women and children. In view of that increase, it is imperative that the newly established Ministry of Women's Affairs, in collaboration with NGOs, focus on the root causes and consequences of domestic violence in order to identify appropriate measures to combat the problem.

46. The organizations of the United Nations system have continued to make efforts to improve the conditions of Palestinian women. Many of the initiatives undertaken by the entities of the United Nations system have been aimed at long-term sustainable development for Palestinian people, including women. It is important that the United Nations entities continue to assist Palestinian women in coping with the socio-economic difficulties they face as a result of the conflict. Palestinian women continue to require assistance with income-generating projects aimed at poverty alleviation, education and training, access to health care and health-care services, and with ongoing advocacy initiatives aimed at combating violence against women and protecting their fundamental human rights. Member States, entities of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and other relevant institutions should intensify their efforts to provide financial and technical assistance to Palestinian women. These targeted efforts should be accompanied by increased efforts to visibly address gender dimensions in all activities of support and assistance to the Palestinian people in the socio-economic and humanitarian fields.

47. While the reports by relevant bodies provided considerable information on the overall situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and made reference to women, limited information was provided on the specific situation of women and girls. The specific impacts of the crisis on women, as compared to men, should be highlighted so that targeted actions can be taken to mitigate gender-specific negative impacts. Gender perspectives should be more fully integrated into international assistance programmes through, inter alia, in-depth gender analysis and the collection of data disaggregated by sex. Gender

perspectives should also be fully incorporated into all studies and reports undertaken by the United Nations on the Palestinian people in order to effectively assess the impact of the situation of Palestinian women.

48. Since the status and living conditions of Palestinian women are linked to achieving a peaceful resolution of the conflict, additional efforts need to be made by the international community to end the violent confrontations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In that regard, it is particularly important that women are fully involved in all conflict-resolution and peacebuilding initiatives to be undertaken in the region, in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). It is also important that efforts be made to increase women's full participation in decision-making processes at all levels.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/59/35), para. 26.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., para. 25.

[4] International Labour Organization, "The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories", International Labour Conference, 92nd session, 2004 (ILO, 2004), para. 18.

[5] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/59/35), para. 26.

[6] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 13* (A/59/13), para. 6.

[7] International Labour Organization, "The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories", International Labour Conference, 92nd session, 2004 (ILO, 2004).

[8] World Bank, "Palestinian perceptions of their quality of life and of the current economic environment", *West Bank and Gaza Update* (2004).

[9] World Bank, "Recent economic developments", *West Bank and Gaza Update* (2004).

[10] International Labour Organization, "The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories", International Labour Conference, 92nd session, 2004 (ILO, 2004), para. 90.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., para. 72.

[13] Ibid., para. 79.

[14] Ibid., para. 91.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics 2004 youth survey.